Enter the world of videogame speedrunning

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Donald DeChellis picks up a videogame controller and stares intently into a large computer screen. The vintage game *Super Mario World* flickers to life, but this is no typical video-gaming session. DeChellis, who works at the Laboratory's plutonium processing plant, is a speedrunner in his spare time, a type of video-gamer whose goal is to complete the entire game as quickly as possible.

"Most of the videogames I've played I've managed to complete in about one and one-half hours," DeChellis says. "These are complete runs, through all levels."

Speedrunning in the videogames community has been around since the early 1990s. Although its origins have not been formally documented, it likely started after the release of the videogame *Doom*. One of the game's features allowed players to record videos of their play through the levels. About a year after *Doom*'s release, a gamer named Christina Norman launched a site which chronicled the best play-through runs of the game.

Other websites soon followed, with competition among players leading to communities dedicated to completing other videogames as quickly as possible. Now the website Speedrun.com, dedicated specifically to the speedrunning community, boasts 120,000 registered users that have achieved more than 480,000 speedruns.

Types of competition

DeChellis first learned about speedrunning while in college. "It was sort of a way for me to pass the time," he says. "For me, it was pretty cool to beat a game in a short amount of time, just play this game all the way through and then turn it off for the night."

Today's speedrunners compete in various types of competition. One type is to complete the game all the way through as quickly as possible including collecting all key items, finding all the game's secret features and completing any side quests required of the game.

"Then there's what is called the 'Any%,'" says DeChellis, "where you complete the game under the simplest conditions with the shortest possible time. This type of competition is the most popular with players, as it has minimal rules when it comes to what you can and can't do."

Although DeChellis does not hold any current speed records in officially released videogames, he has achieved record times in "hack-games," modified versions of traditional videogames.

"There's a hack released in 2012 known as *Kaizo Mario World 3*," says DeChellis, "and I am the first person to speedrun it—to beat it in one sitting. It's a game that's too hard for most people to even beat, but I can now beat it in about 47 minutes. I also hold a record speedrun in *Super Panga World*, another difficult hack of *Super Mario World*."

The speedrunning community

DeChellis notes that speedrunning is on the rise. "It's actually tiny right now, but it is growing," he says.

Speedrunners tend to be competitive with themselves but not necessarily with each other. "Speedrunning is not as aggressively competitive as you might think," says DeChellis. "There's a lot of sharing going on—if someone finds a new strategy to beat a game, he or she will immediately share it. Everyone is pretty open about sharing ways to beat a game faster."

Speedrunners have also started to form speedrun marathons: webstreams of multiple videogames being challenged in succession. Many of these marathons are similar to fan conventions, with speedrunners raising money for charity. In 2017, the Awesome Games Done Quick marathon raised more than $2 million for the Prevent Cancer Foundation.

"These marathons are a lot of fun," says DeChellis with a smile. "They're an opportunity for speedrunners to come out from behind the screen, get together and talk about the latest innovations and strategies related to speedrunning."

"I think anybody who wants to can speedrun. It comes down to noting things that you can cut out or down to improve speed," says DeChellis. "It's a strategy we all learn in normal life, asking ourselves, 'do we really need to spend so much time on a certain task?' All of us already do this, and it's just a matter of applying this strategy to playing a videogame."

> *Learn more about DeChellis' speedrunning.*